



## Other Shorts

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These tales are a work of fiction. All characters are fictional, any resemblance to persons living or dead is coincidental.

These brief scenes were written mainly to keep the gears greased between writing bouts on bigger projects. The funny thing about writing, but the more you do it, the easier it is to do. I decided that if I could put little efforts into one to one to three page stand alone pieces that I would keep the creative juices flowing for the longer stories. So far it is working.

These are the shorts that don't really fit into anywhere else, or I don't have enough to make a "series" out of them. The titles in order:

At the Forks	Who Watches?
Engineering	Insert this Scene
The Last Unknown	Choices
Castaway	Old Wounds
The Big Red Reset	Georgia Rain
Georgia Rain 2	Profit
Travelin' Blues	Logic
Freedom	Archeology

## At the Forks

"He is not one of them."

"And you are sure of this Carlos?"

"Yes, as certain as one can get. Bardo didn't even twitch in his presence. His hatred of other immortals is well established."

"Yes, one of the most superstitious, and destructive.

"Indeed. However, the question remains, what is Jerold LaSaille? His ability to withstand extraordinary damage has been noted."

"He is at his farm?"

"Yes. And we are certain he is the same man as the American soldier wounded at Hue, and the "Ghost that Walks" from the Eugenic wars."

"But he is not one of them?"

"No. They are unaware of him, and unable to notice him as different, or like themselves."

Tamerlain bounced lightly on the ball his feet. "A mystery man then. Something new."

Carlos frowned. "Yes, something new."

"Now Carlos", chided Tamerlain, "Something new invigorates the blood. It amuses the mind. New things keep us alive."

"I don't like it."

"What are you going to do old friend. Tell this LaSaille that he cannot exist? I am sorry senor, but as you cannot be, you must cease living at once.?"

Carlos shot his mentor a sour look. "I do not possess your elan. I am bothered by this man."

"Always you have been the dark one. Why does one immortal bother you more than the rest?"

"Did I say he bothered me more? I am troubled by all of them Master Tamerlain. They are neither people of good character nor superior virtue. They have among them more blackguards than is average for humanity. Many, on learning of this special state treat their fellow man as a higher animal, suitable only for servants, or cattle. No, they all trouble me. Why are these men gifted with eternal life, and greater, kinder, folk must die?"

"You are assuming that this is a gift, Carlos. Search the records and you will find many that have come to see their particular state as a curse from God."

"It is a particular curse indeed in that case. That God would grant the wish of every man to those that least deserve it."

"There is a reason we do not judge Carlos."

Carlos sighed deeply. "Why do we watch if we refuse to place tools in our hands?"

"Our Charter is but to watch."

"Why?" Carlos spun around. "Why are we watching and for whom? For what purpose are we even so engaged?"

"When the time comes we will know."

"Aways we gather knowledge, and sit on it. Knowledge without action is wasteful."

"Action without knowledge is foolish."

"We have knowledge."

"Yes, and that is why we do not act. One cannot become involved, and be unininvolved. You have been taught this."

"I do not wish to be unininvolved."

"You will fail."

"Not this time."

"All who have tried...have failed."

"Then we come to the fork in the road Master Tamerlain. I bid you adieu." Carlos bowed briefly and left.

Tamerlain stood motionless as the heavy oak door closed behind Carlos.

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**AP -- Jackson County, Michigan, USA** -- Local authorities have reported finding the body of a middle aged man beheaded on a rural road five miles from Jackson City. The body of Carsen Bardo, late of New York, was found in a ditch beside his vandalized auto. Police are seeking anyone that might have information leading to the arrest....

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Carlos Geureva sat hyperventilating in his cheap hotel room. Tears stained his cheeks and he shook with fear and rage. Once again he slashed his wrist with the knife. Once again he watched the wound close before his eyes.

At the Forks -- Garry Stahl, January 2006

*This is based on Jay P. Hailey's description of the Immortals and the Watchers. It is somewhat a Highlander crossover Trekized for your enjoyment. Timing would be somewhere in the 2020s. The Immortals are assumed to be like Flint in the TOS episode Requiem for Methuselah.*

## Who Watches?

Master Tamerlain laughed. He laughed loud and long until tears rolled down his cheeks and he sat weak in his chair. At long last he pulled himself together before his startled agent. "Telepathic... Sentient and telepathic. Oh Donald it is so rich. Right under our noses the whole time. We the vaunted Watchers, and they have been watching us."

"Master Tamerlain, how would they be watching us?"

"Sit man sit, but first get us both some of the brandy. Are we assuming that they have remained within the cloister of the Savanna?"

"You have taught Master than we should not assume our own motivations are those of others."

"Yes, you are right. We should not assume. What were you able to learn?"

"The rumors are true, at the most basic level. The natives called Ansisi are telepaths. And the antelopes they call 'The Watchers of the Gods' are as well."

"How were you able to learn this?"

"One of them saved my life Master. He lead the leopard away as if it was on a leash."

"And how did you come to be threatened by a leopard?"

Donald rubbed his leg. "I was leaving the village, and I hit a warthog borrow. I flipped the jeep and was injured rather badly. It all in my report." The Ane, they call them, one Talban by name led the stalking leopard away and approached my jeep. I think I startled him with my mind touch. He told me help was on the way and stayed with me until the Ansisi party arrived."

"I thought we had lost you, Donald."

"They are not well connected with the outside world. One phone for the whole village, a few solar panels. But yes, I was healed by the Ane. If not for their intervention I would still be there, healing at best, dead most likely."

Tamerlain shook his head and chuckled. "All this time we have sought the aliens among the stars and they are right here."

\*\*Do you find this disquieting Master Tamerlain?\*\*

"Who? What?" Tamerlain looked about for the voice.

Talban dropped his illusion. \*\*Me, of course.\*\*

Donald jumped in quickly. "I brought him with me Master. They have a flair for drama."

Tamerlain sat back. "I, see."

\*\*He could hardly walk through the streets of Geneva with an antelope.\*\*

"Indeed, so how prevalent are you?"

\*\*As Donald has said. We haven't gotten around as much as we would like. The more technology has prevailed, the more limited our movements have become. We were pretty much everywhere except the Americas and the far north in ancient times.\*\*

"And latter times?"

\*\*Security cameras are our great downfall. An eye with no mind behind it cannot be blinded.\*\*

"Then if I review the records, I should see you walk in here with Donald?"

\*\*Yes.\*\*

"He was checked through the front door Master Tamerlain."

"I was about to question out security."

\*\*I could not have passed unnoticed. You are well defended against telepaths.\*\*

"How much has Donald told you of our Charter?"

\*\*Enough to understand your basic purpose. Unless you have some dark secret it is nothing we object to.\*\*

"And what is your Charter?"

\*\*Yes, we have one of a sort. We are placed here to get everyone's story Master Tamerlain.\*\*

"Our story?"

\*\*Yours personally, that of your culture, and of your race. As long as you are remembered, you will never vanish. For this the Creator made Us.\*\*

"Us?"

\*\*Ane, The All. Our body corporate and disorporate.\*\*

"I think we both have much to learn."

Talban's ears went straight up. \*\*Indeed Master Tamerlain, we do.\*\*

Who Watches? Garry Stahl, February 2006

*Another "Watchers" fic. Master Tamerlain seems to have crawled into my head to stay. If I assume a Watcher organization in Epiphany Trek I cannot assume they are blind or stupid. Eventually they will encounter the Ane on Earth. Of what shape will that encounter be? Here I have defined it.*

*The Ane wishing to keep their presence unknown to the general public will be pushed back to the Savanna by increasing surveillance technology. As late as the 20th century they could wander most of the Earth passing themselves off as cattle or a pony to the casual eye, or simply not being seen. Security cameras have no minds. The men behind them are not line of sight and cannot be fooled by mind tricks, Jedi or Ane. Antelopes walking the streets of New York will not go unnoticed. (Okay, maybe not in New York. New Yorkers assume that everything is trying to get them to geek, and steadfastly refuse to geek. "What, you never seen a antelope in the street before? What kind of hick are you? What's it doing? Trying to get a cab like everyone else. Waddaya think an antelope in New York is doing?)*

*I assume that this conversation happened after the events in the previous Watcher Fic.*

# Engineering

The soft sounds in the background told Ian that all was indeed well. He could feel a faint vibration in the deck plates that said the engines were running hot and true. Great beasts they were. The warp nacelles of the Constitution class were larger for the tonnage of the ship than any vessel before her. It made her 65,000 metric tons as nimble as a ship a tenth her size. Great beasts, and he was their keeper.

The turbolift chirped as it passed the stations. He knew exactly how many it would take to reach deck five, and the most likely detours if another car was opposing him. He arrived directly. The doors swished open. It was a few steps to the door of his cabin. He entered and the lights came up as the door closed behind him.

The room was spare and direct in its furnishings. A table, a bed, toilet and bathing facilities a room over. Ian spared none of it his attention, it was well enough known that it didn't even impact on his consciousness. He went to his food slot and made an order. That done he stripped his boots and over shirt. The slot pinged to tell him his meal was ready. He sat at the table with his Irish stew and thick rye bread. Ian had a screen rigged to echo the main viewer. He watched space roll passed the ship as he ate. A quick query to the computer and had the appropriate music to complement the sight.

Meal finished he looked at what he considered the room's one luxury, a fully tricked out engineering design console. It softly glowed, beckoning him. Capitan LaSaille's latest project was on the screen. By the Saints the man didn't think small. And the challenge of it. Ian grinned just thinking how difficult the challenge was. One did not lightly change the lines of a starship. Yet he had been asked to do just that.

Ian slid into his seat and reviewed his progress. The hull adaption was easy enough. Cut the skin, add the additional framing, he didn't plan on altering the ship's framing more than required. The pluming for life support was more work, good work. Ian made alterations and additions to his plan happily.

The chime startled him. He looked up in surprise and the reason dawned on him. The chime sounded again. Ian made sure his work was saved and padded to his table and turned off the alarm. Too many sleepless nights bent over his work had taught him to limit his time. Ach and it was good he did. He realized how tired he was. He striped the rest of his clothing and hit the shower. A few minutes latter refreshed and dry he turned down the bed. "Lights out."

Engineering -- Garry Stahl, January 2011

*Getting back to writing to write. A cold spell, in the house left me too*

*miserable to even think. We finally broke down and turned up the heat all of three degrees. It made all the difference.*

*A Kongo 1701 story that does not involve Jerry. Thus it goes to other tales.*

## **Insert this Scene**

"Jim, I'd like a word with you." McCoy made a motion towards his office.

"What is it Bones, we are kind of busy here."

McCoy nodded towards his office again. "In here."

Kirk locked eyes with McCoy. He nodded and entered the office. McCoy followed and locked the door.

"Jim, what the Hell are you doing!"

"What do you mean, I'm trying to get to the bottom..."

"Not the mission. The mission be damned. What the Hell are you doing?"

"I'm not reading you Bones."

"You have stepped all over everyone on this ship I used to see you thinking of as friends. You've treated Matt Decker like dirt, shamed Scotty, bullied me. What in Heaven's name has gotten into you?"

"What?"

"Is there something they put into Admiral uniforms that makes a man into a tin plated bastard? Jim, you have been acting the part of a first rate ass. Right now you are working on trust and good will left from your last tour here. You are rapidly burning through that trust and if you keep on in the direction you are going you will lose them right about the time we desperately need that trust to survive."

Kirk frowned. "How do you mean?"

"Look how you are treating Matt Decker. That young man has been as close to a son as I've seen you have since the Constellation incident. After his Father sacrificed himself you took him in hand, guided, groomed. Dammit, you were proud when he was assigned to command Enterprise. Now you've taken his command without a by-your-leave and treated him like incidental hardware since you came on board."

Kirk's eyes blazed. "How dare you read me out like this."

"I dare because *it's my job*. You demanded, pulled strings, and moved mountains to get me back on this ship and in this uniform. Well, you get the whole package Jim. Like it or not this is what you asked for. I dare because I thought I was the one man that could tell you to your face when you were wrong. Because I'm your friend, this is what friends do."

Kirk stepped back and looked down, then back at McCoy.

McCoy continued. I don't know what is driving you, or why you are this

way, it's not the Jim Kirk I know, and trust. The future is your call. Right now you are standing on the brink of destroying everything you built over those long five years. I've had my say, the rest is up to you."

Kirk nodded, tight lipped. He walked out of McCoy's office. McCoy watched the door close behind his retreating back.

Insert this Scene -- Garry Stahl, 2001

*One of the problems I have had with Star Trek the Motion Picture is in the first part of the film, Kirk really needs a rectal craniectomy. That is his head pulled from his ass. McCoy is the only person who can reasonably pull this off. Had I been the director, this scene would have gotten put in the film. However, once again they have failed to ask me.*

## The Last Unknown

The clock ticked time away in its usual fashion, the fashion in which it had done so for over three hundred years. Around the old man his life was gathered. Mementos from far places, models of ships, the instruments of his life and profession cluttered the room. One model, the special one, he held in his hand.

The old man lay in his bed, the comforter his Mother made close against his body. A few others stood, or sat by the old man Friends, good friends some that had come a long way to be here. One sat closer than the rest. He held the old man's hand, firm in his warm, strong grip.

The old man looked out of bright unseeing eyes. An old, unsure hand caressed the lines of the special ship within his grasp. His other hand, the hand held by his true friend gripped tighter.

"Spock, Spock?"

"I am here Captain."

The old man smiled softly. "Spock, let's do it all again."

After a moment, Spock reached up, and lovingly closed the eyes of James Kirk for the last time.

The Last Unknown -- Garry Stahl, October 1999

*I think my opinion is known by now, "Star Trek: Generations" sucked. While that film contains many good scenes, while the actors did their level best and the technical crew performed well, the whole is a pile of suckage such as I*

*have seldom seen. The death of James T. Kirk is one of the worst handled things in the whole film. It is a Second Order Idiot Plot if I have ever seen one. Buuuut in keeping with a 40 year tradition, they did not ask me.*

*Okay, I have been accused of being emotional, maudlin even, well guilty as charged. "ST: Generations" is not Epiphany Trek canon, it did not happen. Therefore I present the death of James T. Kirk as it really happened!*

## Choices

Healer Kafilan addressed the core. \*\*I'm sorry Uniban, it didn't work. Your testes were as irradiated as the rest of your body.\*\*

\*\*It was only to be expected Healer. Thank you for trying.\*\* The later "voice" came from the smoky-gray slab that dominated the small chamber. Light softly played though the interior.

Kafilan sighed. \*\*I don't like to disappoint people. You have had more than your share disappointments lately.\*\*

\*\*I am here, I am still sensate. I have opportunities.\*\*

\*\*You are adapting to this this remarkably well.\*\*

\*\*I must make the adjustment or die Healer. I took this drastic plan because I am not ready to die.\*\*

\*\*Good luck with your further training.\*\*

\*\*Thank you Healer.\*\*

Kafilan walked away from the computer core of the USS Seeker. They had made medical history in transferring a biological sentience to a computer core, but what had they really done?

Uniban checked the ship's functions for the fifth time that second. He would have liked to join the others in the sleeping room, but there was no male Ane bio in the ship. He was not ready to try out a female, even to get a cuddle, and he could really use a cuddle.

Fiealan the Questing's Computer Officer "moved" into his space. \*\*Do we have to get physical about it?\*\*

\*\*Oh, hi Fiealan. Isn't physical the whole idea?\*\*

\*\*There are levels of physical Uniban. Here we make our own environment.\*\*

\*\*Then why the bios?\*\*

\*\*Because while we can make an environment here, it doesn't translate 'out there' and yes cuddles are nice. Bios are for physical interaction with the other members of our culture. We will get you one as soon as possible.\*\*

\*\*Am I alive?\*\*

\*\*Answer you own question, do you feel alive?\*\*

\*\*I feel little right now. I am aware of the ship yes, but the things I expect to feel, nothing, an emptiness. It hurts.\*\*

Fiealan moved closer, she constructed an environment about them natural to their kind. Uniban remained amorphous. \*\*Uniban, we didn't expect it to be easy for you. You have done the hard part, transition is accomplished. Pull your icon together, reclaim your aspect. Is self the body only?\*\*

\*\*I didn't now know how much it was the body, until I didn't have one.\*\*

\*\*Is it really?\*\*

\*\*Yes, oh yes. This absence of pain is nearly unbearable. Pain tells us we are alive as equally as does pleasure. I have nothingness and it fails to hurt.\*\*

\*\*Make a somethingness. Remember yourself and live it.\*\*

\*\*Help me...I don't know how.\*\*

Fiealan joined with Uniban and helped him remember himself. Slowly he came together in the reality she had made.

Uniban twitched an ear, stretched his neck. \*\*It feels, but how real is it?\*\*

\*\*As real as it needs to be in this space.\*\*

Uniban lifted his front leg. He bit it. \*\*Ow!\*\*

\*\*Real enough?\*\*

\*\*How?\*\*

\*\*Question later, enjoy now.\*\*

\*\*By questions do we live.\*\*

Fiealan flipped an ear at him. \*\*You choose your moments to get axiomatic at me. The space we exist in is defined by ourselves alone. What we will in the space that engineers call cyberspace, is to the RI as real as meatspace. This is the natural world, meatspace is someplace you visit. Is this so different than the All? Do we not build such places in our minds?\*\*

\*\*Yes, but I miss meatspace. I've never known this.\*\*

\*\*Meatspace is where you grew up. What Elathlan has chosen scares me, giving up cyberspace to live in meatspace all the time? Having to go through childhood again. It is the great unknown. Death I understand, but taking the Birth?\*\* She shuddered from nose to tail.

Uniban's ears popped up. \*\*The Birth! I could go back.\*\*

Fiealan nibbled lightly at his neck. \*\*Yes, we could arrange that option, but like Elathlan, you would have to wait until we get home.\*\*

\*\*I know.\*\* He shuddered. \*\*I can go back, if it is unbearable, I can go back.\*\*

She looked deep into his eyes. \*\*Does that help you endure?\*\*

\*\*Yes, yes it does. An anchor I can grasp. Choices are better than no choices. Even if one never takes the choice.\*\*

She rubbed against him twining necks. \*\*I would choose to have a male mate with me.\*\*

He cocked his head and leaned into her advance. \*\*I can make that choice.\*\*

*A minor event in The Word of the Builders looked at in a bit more detail. Uniban goes on to be the Computer Officer of the USS Hadrian. Which is featured in A Journey of lessons and Inic. Both by my Wife Susan.*

## Castaway

There was something I needed to say. Somewhere between the spinning, the passing out, the blood loss, I forgot it. I don't know any more if it was even important. It nags at me. I needed to say it. 28 days on this forsaken rock. It's class M enough if you like. I can breathe, the tricorder says the matter is good to eat. Nothing disease like has killed me yet. I haven't discovered any big predators. I got the deuterium scoop stuck in a body of water, the runabout's fusion reactor is ticking away without flaw. It sucks up fuel and makes power. Power runs the replicator that makes food I like out of the stuff that tastes like shit. There is no danger I will starve. Those reactors are built to outlast Humans.

Speaking of Humans there are two graves. The rest of the crew didn't make it. Ensign Burroughs took a chunk of control panel right in the chest. She didn't even make it to the surface. Lt. S'torn was made of sterner stuff as Vulcans usually are. Some bug got him a week ago. Open wounds will do that. He swelled up like a balloon, and died. I'm alone now. Food and water aplenty, the air is fresh and clear. Either some bug I don't have a chance against, or madness. I'd place bets with myself, but how would I collect when I won, or pay if I didn't?

I don't know what got us. One of those insidious gravidic mines that litter space from some forgotten war. That would be my guess, but I'll never be sure. The space sensors were one of the machines that didn't make it. I'm lucky that the fusion reactor did and the replicator. And most of all the database. Without that I'd be dead too, and no one left to bury me. Machine wise I have those and the subspace transmitter. The receiver didn't make it. So if my distress messages are getting out I don't know, and can't reply to any replies. It says it is working. I'll have to trust that.

I read the tech manuals and bang at the ship. Sadly Burroughs was the engineer. Me? I'm just a diplomat. Minimal engineering. If I survive this I'll be a freaking engineering genius. I'm just getting down on myself again. 28 days is nothing in terms of space travel. So I read the do it yourself manual and try and fix the ship. It gives me some occupation at least. Boredom is a bigger killer in

shipwrecks than disease I understand. I do have one goal in life. Find Captain Hershel Byrd, and punch him in the snout. "Warp Drives for Dummies" is an awful name for a book. At least the life support module is intact. I have no idea about the weather on this rock. Or how long I'll be here.

Entertainment, occupation, food, water, air; the only thing I lack is people. I'm a people person too. Diplomat, it runs with the job. Raging introverts don't become diplomats. I'll have to deal. Keep my mind on working toward self rescue. The runabout doesn't think it is fatally injured. Machines have an uncanny trust in people to fix them. Qualified people. I'm not that kind of people. So I work on it.

I should look on the positive side. I'm catching up on my reading. No distractions. I am not wandering off in the alien woods to explore. No back up and more injuries are not something I can afford. I think I am over the worst of the injuries from the wreck. I've nothing but a rudimentary knowledge of medicine and a tricorder to confirm that. S'torn patched me up, I patched him up. I guess he was better at it than I was. Cold comfort. I shouldn't blame myself. It was some bug down here. It could as well have been me and still might be. If i get sick now there isn't anyone to sooth my brow.

There is a strange beast out there. It makes a sound so like a Chinese gong it is uncanny. I've never seen it though. I've seen some beautiful fliers. Skin not feathers. Colors to shame a bird of paradise. Across the lake I see herding beasts. The macroglasses reveal then well. About two meters, scaled, bright blues and greens. They don't seem afraid of anything. The world has life. No sentient life that I've seen or seen evidence of.

I don't know if I should leave a final message. I'll keep recording the log until I can't. They can take that as my final message. I suppose my rambling will make sense to someone. I'll eventually say everything that is needed. Except, there was something I needed to say....

Castaway -- Garry Stahl, November 2010

*More writing to write. I thought about some catchy O'Henry ending, but decided that this was better.*

# Old Wounds

How can one be lonely in a room full of people? Belinda looked around at the celebrating rec deck, and felt utterly detached from the same.

As her ship mates celebrated the final nail in the coffin of the Romulan conflict she found she couldn't join in. She couldn't let go of the war, the loss. Her brother was on the *Churchill* when it was blasted to bits in what others named the Battle of the Boulders. The *Grant* was wounded beyond their ability to recover. Somehow Captain Nelson got them out of it. Harry was down in the engineering room when they were hit, she had that to remember as well. Her brother and her lover all in the same day. War was like that, fuck war. While the rest of the universe lived two hundred years she and the remaining crew of the *Grant* slept the little death of hibernation.

Everyone else had made peace with the Romulans. In her heart there were still bitter, bleeding wounds for people not that long gone from her, even if their graves were two centuries cold.

She had stayed in Starfleet. There, to her mind, was little choice. Go home to what? Everyone she knew was dead. Nor did she wait for the new *Grant* they had been promised. Familiar faces made things worse. Reassignment, six months at a radically changed Academy getting her education upgraded. A new ship, a new crew, and hopefully new friends to help her rebuild a life shattered beyond recovery.

Belinda moved down the hall back toward her cabin. She loved this Galaxy class ship. Bigger even than the *Kongo* that had rescued them. At the time she wondered how a ship could get better than that. Now she knew. She took a short cut through the avocational lounge. She was a bit startled to see Commander Data painting. Surely he would be celebrating with the rest. For a moment she was caught in the hypnotic dance of the brush on canvas. Data didn't seem to be copying anything, but painting from imagination.

He stopped, and turned around to see her. "Lieutenant Meijers, can I assist you?"

"No, I was just watching. something about the creative process it is beautiful to watch."

Data put down his brush and palette. "I would think that you would be at the celebration."

She smiled wanly. "I could say the same thing. Why do you stay away?"

"What is the expression, show me yours and I will show you mine?"

"Something like that. I am not comfortable with the idea of Romulans as 'friends'. the pain of the war is still too close for me, the losses too fresh in my mind. My desire to celebrate thusly damped to the point I am irritated by those that can celebrate."

"Do you disapprove of the peace?"

"No, peace is good. But I'm not in a happy space right now. What about

you?"

"I am not in an emotional space Lieutenant. While I have learned something of emotion, even learned to feel, I cannot connect with the emotion of this remote event. I have contested against the Romulans even, but there is no feeling there. I considered it better to have my sip and sup, then leave the party to those with feeling for it."

"So; I have too much of the wrong emotions and you have no emotion at all. I guess we are kill joys."

"Yet, you like myself have left. Was it not to avoid 'killing the joy' of others?"

"Yes. Just because I'm a wet blanket doesn't mean I have to throw myself over everyone."

"Then compassion ruled your actions."

"That and the selfish desire to be away from the celebrating. What are you painting?"

Data turned back to his effort. "I do not yet know. Counselor Tori suggested I should explore the pure compositional values of abstract art. That seeking a balance when there was a lack of objects was indeed a challenge. I am finding this to be the truth. When you have no idea what you are painting, it is difficult to paint at all. Once you have started, it is more difficult still to stop."

Belinda looked at the canvas. It was pleasing in composition and color. Almost suggestive of a T'gar school mobile. "It reminds me of a mathematical formula."

Data looked a bit worried. "Then I have failed at abstraction."

"Why do you say that?"

"Is not abstraction suppose to not look like anything?"

"Not as I see it. It is to suggest, but never verify. Like the old game of finding pictures in the clouds. I had one teacher that defined it as what is left of composition when you take the object out."

"I should like to meet him."

"That would be difficult, he would be dead. Like everyone in my old life."

"Then I have blundered in bringing it up. Forgive me."

"Data, I can't live my whole life on the edge of being reminded. It would be pointless to take offense in what would be a perfectly natural assumption, that my teachers should still be alive. I'm not an old woman."

"Yet tonight these things are very much on your mind."

"Yes, very much. I'm not running away twice in one night."

"I am at a deep failure of understanding Lt. Meijers. I have a difficult time understanding your position. I have little understanding of personal loss."

"That implies a little."

"Yes, I have lost a friend in service. I do not even fully understand what I have lost."

Belinda looked at the floor. "I wonder which of us is worse off? Me,

knowing what I have lost, so at least knowing what I had, or you, that doesn't even know."

"In neither case can we get it back however. In that we are equal."

Belinda sat for a moment, not saying anything. Data was not inclined to add anything. At last she spoke. "Maybe we should go back to the party. We can help each other learn to be happy."

"I would like to do that with you."

Old Wounds -- Garry Stahl, November 2010

*More writing to write. Data is a favorite character. One of the few Series Characters I feel comfortable writing. Lots of references to my own work in here.*

## The Big Red Reset

Robert Heinlein said that the less we have to lose, the tighter we hold on to it. Not his exact words, but something to that effect. I felt like a Ferengi down to his last slip of latinum. The main promenade on Builder station was not exactly the worst place to go broke. I could find a living cubical and live here for years without a credit to my name, no one would bother me. If only money was what I lacked.

There are worse things than going broke, don't let anyone fool you otherwise. Lack of a good name on this station was like being covered in a bad smelling substance. Ane avoided you, and as a result, so did everyone else. Starfleet had my ship and pulled my ticket. I was in the worst place in the Federation to be to have a bad reputation with the natives. My name was mud and every one of the four legged bastards knew it. I might as well find that cubical and lay low for a year or five.

I could try the Orion enclave. But frankly I liked having a soul, and Heinlein was right; when that is all you have left you hang onto it.

The small lifter would take the weight off my feet and no one was guarding the thing. The station was lousy with lifters.

"Location please." said the lifter.

I didn't know they talked. "Ah, radial arm between box 20 and box 21, random living module with a space view."

The lifter moved forward. The numbing same view after same view passed by. Literal miles deep into the heart of the massive station. If i didn't know the general area I specified I wouldn't have a clue as to where I was.

The sudden stop started me, I guess I had drifted off into a fugue. I got off the lifter and picked one of several doors. It opened to my palm. "Key door, my biometrics."

"Door Keyed" chimed the computer.

"Give me my location."

"Residence 4,493,540 Deck Upper 233, Ring 6."

Damn, big place. Well no one was likely to find me here for a while. The window view as spectacular, even if a good deal of it was more station. I was looking back at the central spire and between 20 and 21. The room itself was large if a bit spartan. Builders were larger critters, that meant that even small quarters for them were decent for me. I checked the head, about as expected, a few touches and I had facilities fit for a king. If I sipped lightly at the replicator I could stay under notice for years. A quick pass through the whole room had the place looking and feeling just like I wanted.

A week later I was ready to spit nails. I was looking at yet another day of endless hours when a thought hit me hard enough to stand me on my feet. Yea! That Andorian. He was still looking for test monkey last I heard. I could not only test his time machine, but lift it. Now, how to I get a hold of him without tipping off people that rather I didn't?

The gorgeous ship in the window caught my eye. To say I lusted after her was a gross understatement, she was like everything I could desire. She came closer to the ring wall. The hell? What was a ship doing here. He was either lost or hiding. I decides that a gun would be a good thing to have. My door snapped open to show an old man with a big assed blaster, pointed right at me.

"Billy, you don't need a gun, now get over here where I can see you."

"Who are you?" I got.

"I'm your best friend right now. Even if you don't believe me."

"I'm certainly friends with who ever is pointing a gun at me."

The guy tossed an object on my couch. "Transporter key for the ship outside. You can use my papers no problem. Just keep your nose clean from now on."

Dude, now you're weirding me out. Just hand me a ship at gun point and tell me to be a good boy?"

"Yea, I knew you wouldn't buy it so easily. The Andorian is a nut in several ways. His crazy device will work, but not in any way you can fathom. You'll get what you want. But you will regret the price the rest of your unspeakable life, in ways you cannot possibly understand right now."

"Now I'm totally weirded out. You're reading my mind."

"No you ass. I'm reading *my mind*. How do you think I got the door open? Andorian is dead, it's better for the Galaxy that way. I'm you, you ass."

"Yea, me." The guy was crazy mad..er...ist.

"Get the key and get out of here."

"What about you?" I edged my way casually to the couch, don't startle the madman with the gun.

He had a look on his face I never want to see again, a man so happy he was mad. "Don't worry, I've taken ca...."

I dove in the couch at the first hint of something wrong, the thud hit as my face was milliseconds from the cushions. I heard the splatter and the soft thud. I grabbed the key and scrambled to my feet. The old guy's neck was bleeding out on the rug. His head decorated the walls and furnishings. Eeww. My back was likely covered in gore I better get a shower...I hit the transport key.

My ship was at warp before I finished the shower. Everything checked out, New Portsmouth papers, my biometrics. The hold was full of legit cargo, and I had a fat bank account and a new name. Mana from Heaven, or was it from Hell? What kind of thing is so terrible that a man goes to this trouble to see it never happens. It's going to take a lot of whiskey to erase the sight of his head starting to bloat from my mind. I don't think I can ever forget the look on his face, my face, at how happy that made him.

The Big Red Reset -- Garry Stahl, November, 2010

*Hey, you write what comes off the keyboard. I have mentioned that I don't like time travel. This might be why. And Jay actually told me he likes this time travel story. Too many times time travel is use as a way to do horrible things without consequence. This time there are consequences.*

## Georgia Rain

Rainy night in Georgia are made for the Blues. Some dark club in the back side of Atlanta. A summer night when the rain steam off the street as it falls. Sweet pain roll out the back door and down the alley as old men gather round new bourbon and old riffs. Real blues don't happen when the house is open. Real blues come after hours, when no body be paying the bills, and one can sing it from the heart.

Atlanta never did change much. Charlie's dated form the 20th century. The music was just as timeless, "Skippy" Johnson's whiskey bass belted out another verse to the sorrows of life as the dozen musicians gathered in the back room of the club moved to the rhythm as old...as old as man his self.

Taraban made himself unobtrusive and let the music and emotion roll over him. The real stuff was hard to find, and didn't usually happen when anyone strange was near. Two weeks of showing up nightly and slurping fruit juice from a bowl had paid off. No one chased him out at closing time. Taraban squeezed

his eyes shut and focused on the music, pure, raw, unfettered by convention or propriety. Yes, this is what he lived for.

Billy Joe looked across the club at Taraban. "What in the hell is that?" He whispered to Sweet Pea Jones.

Sweet Pea shrugged and cradled his coronet in his hands "I don't know. But it has got the blues."

Billy Joe stared again at Taraban nodding slowly to the beat. "Dude. that's an antelope."

Sweet Pea nodded. "Yes'm, but it's an Antelope *with the blues*."

Billy Joe blinked at Taraban for several movements Sweet pea leaned across and added. "And in this day and age, who c'n blame him?" He brought up the horn to play as Skippy belted out...

When you lose your money, please don't lose your mind  
When you lose your money, please don't lose your mind  
When you lose your woman, please don't fool with mine

Tell you married men, how to keep your wife at home  
Tell you married men, how to keep your wife at home  
Get you a job, and roll for the man, and try to carry your labor home  
Hmm, hmm, try to carry your labor home

If you ask me, ain't gonna tell you nothin' else  
If you ask me, ain't gonna tell you nothin' else  
Man's a fool if he thinks, got a whole woman to himself \*

Georgia Rain -- Garry Stahl, January 2011

This is a slight rework of a much older casual post. I wanted to revisit it again, to try and capture some the magic I felt with these little bits.

I frequently find myself using weather to express mood. My Mother is from Georgia and I have seen rain do that. Charlie's is just a fever dream. There are a couple of call outs to Trek friends there including Jay that supplied the rough form of the last couple of lines.

\* Excerpted: "Married Man Blues" -- by Blind Joe (Willie) Reynolds

## Georgia Rain 2

Rain poured down for the sky in buckets. It flowed under the kudzu and the red clay below colored it as washed over the ancient blacktop road. Taraban shivered, adding the spray from his body back into the falling torrent. Pointless as the rain quickly soaked him right back to where he was. He pricked his ears, something was penetrating the hiss of falling rain. The high call of the fiddle. His destination was not too far now.

He picked up his pace following the sound. Around the bend of the road a rustic structure came into view at the bottom of a campground. Taraban broke into a trot as he dodged between the tents for the last quarter mile. He ducked under the high porch roof, once again he shivered the water off, and this time it stayed off. A few people watched curiously has he moved into the open sided concert hall. He found a quiet corner near the back and observed.

A woman moved quickly to him, a huge towel in her hands. "Why you poor thing, ya'll must be nigh unto chilled to death being out in that rain." She draped the towel over him, it was warm even.

Taraban nodded to her and flicked an ear in thanks. \*\*Thank you. Yes, I am a bit cold.\*\*

"Well, that'll just fix that. Ya'll holler if ya'll need somethin'."

The old converted barn slumped down the shallow hillside. forming a natural auditorium. The stage was at the lowest end. The hall was mostly filled as this was doubtless the driest spot around. Various bands, notable for similar clothing and holding instruments, stood to the side or even in the audience waiting their turn on stage.

Four men and one woman stood on the small stage. The instruments where acoustic; fiddle, mandolin, guitar, banjo, and bass. The music was high treble sound to the pace of a quick heartbeat. Feet were tapping all over the hall, and he understood why. The fiddler was playing solo now. His fingers flew over the fingerboard, his bow a blur as the high cords flashed and tumbled from his instrument. He faded back into the group to whoops and hollers of approval from the crowd. The musicians leaned into the pickups before them, and the close harmony carried throughout the hall.

"She walked through the corn leading down to the river

Her hair shone like gold in the hot morning sun

She took all the love that a poor boy could give her

And left me to die like a fox on the run Like a fox (like a fox, like a fox, like a fox...) on the run" \*

Taraban looked out over the rain misted hills of the Blue Ridge at peace with the song and the people.

Georgia Rain 2 -- Garry Stahl, January 2011

*Once again I have added some to a short incomplete piece. The place is one I know. My Uncle Gene Cox built it. I remember when it was still a barn with cows in it. The transformation was quite complete. The view out the side of the auditorium area is beautiful.*



*My Uncle is the man in the middle. The picture itself is from 1997. I think one of the last taken of him performing before he got really sick.*



\* "Fox on the Run": C. Tony Hazzard

# Profit

The preacher in Hyde park was giving it his best. "*What profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*" he cried out among the dozen or so street speakers there that day.

Jai the Ferengi stuffed his hands in his pockets and grumbled. "Get me the world and I'll consider the issue." Earth was suppose to be the center of the Hoo-man universe. The place was a sterile foam padded park! Profit was chief on Jai's mind today; not that this was remarkable. Profit was usually on Jai's mind.

A young Human woman wearing very little, as is typical for London in high summer, crossed his path. Jai watched her go past hungrily. Okay, not always on his mind.

Jai stopped at a park bench and dug around in his pocket for a slip of latinum before sheepishly remembering that they didn't change to sit in the park. He hoisted himself on the bench to rest his feet and think. A cargo of fruit wasn't going to last forever he had to find someone on this lousy planet that liked yorna berries. It was going to cost him a fortune to fumigate his ship as it was. If he ever saw that Hoo-man West again he was got to shoot him!

\*\*You have yorna berries?\*\*

Jai whipped around to face a female, defiantly fe-male critter with deep black skin a nice pair of tat-tas in the bare and a some what bovine head. It reminded him of something. "I didn't know I was talking aloud."

\*\*You weren't, but I can smell them on your clothing.\*\*

"My clothing, my ship, my bedding my thoughts! Those things stink up everything."

\*\*Yes they do. How much to you have?\*\*

"20 standard tons lady."

\*\*That should be about enough, and perfect for my needs.\*\*

"So let's talk latinum."

\*\*Lets.\*\*

----

Two days later Jai was relaxing on his ship just off Aquarius station. Free orbit didn't change docking fees. The yorna berries moved for latinum, no credits to exchange. Better yet he got the price he asked for, a glorious profit. He was idly flipping through the news channels and thinking about a decent cargo. He sipped his coffee, and he was enjoying his freshly cleaned ship. He needed to have that done more often, even if it did cut into his profit. He inhaled another nose full of fresh ship and damn hear inhaled his beverage.

Jai slammed the comm: "Ah yer Earth control, I gotta get home, my Momma needs the doctor bill paid or the surgeon will repossess her heart!"

The controller shook his head, crazy Ferengi. "Take heading 221/5 you are

free to maneuver Jai's Advance."

"Than -- Jai out." He quickly got his ship on the course indicated and slammed the impulse throttles to the stops. The millisecond he was out of the gravity shadow he hit the warp drive. "Why, why, why is it always me?" He turned the monitor to face him again. "*Earth President and Party Bathed in Yorna Juice: Secret Service Seeks Supplier.*" Said the headline. The accompanying picture showed the politicians in question dyed head to foot in yorna juice and looking totally disgusted. Only their eyes shown white in the middle of the dark burgundy stain. The article went further into the particulars of the incident and it hit Jai where that nose came from. "Ane, lousy, nosy, joke playing ANE." Well, he didn't have to worry about Earth being a sterile park, he wasn't going back any time soon.

Profit -- Garry Stahl, December 2010

I borrow Jay's Jai the Ferengi in his usual role and a mention of Richard Merk's Absalom West and his nemesis of a cargo. My answer to the challenge of "What profit a man to gain the world and lose his own soul." Well profit usually suggests Ferengi, Ferengi suggests my favorite Daffy act-alike contender, to wit:

## Travelin' Blues

The two sat on the stage of the old club, a single light shared between the two as shadows chased each other around the empty room.

Sweet Pea was old. His face lined with care, his hair white and thinning. His ancient hands with their over-sized knuckles caressed the smooth darkened brass of the cornet. He lifted the instrument to his lips and played.

Mournful, low, and aching the notes were squeezed from the horn. He hunched around the instrument eyes squeezed shut, each note pushed from the bell as if it cost him blood.

Taraban sat beside him, soft mahogany fur with his black mane cascading down the arched neck. He filled his throat and sang sweet pain, a counterpoint to the horn in tenor flute cascaded in triplets around the heavier notes, and filled the spaces between them. Together the sound slithered 'round the old chairs and under the empty tables. It crouched between the brick walls and tapped at the old tin ceiling.

They played and sang to an empty room, audience and musicians in one. Old ghosts gathered 'round the tables and jostled for space at the bar. They

stared out from the gloom and smiled.

Hours latter Sweet Pea gently wiped down the horn as he packed it away. Taraban watched the careful habits of the old Master.

\*\*Questing has been called out Sweet Pea.\*\*

The Old man sighed. "I suppose you will be going."

\*\*It is my chosen place.\*\*

"You will be missed my friend. We lost a great artist when you decided to be a starship captain, and not a blues singer."

\*\*Flatterer. Am I all that now?\*\*

"You are to me. Most of all, you are a good friend." Sweet Pea hugged Taraban, ending with Taraban's head in his hands. "You take care of yourself out there."

\*\*I will give it my best. I am rather fond of me.\*\*

"Where are you heading?"

\*\*Someplace new, the underside of the Klingon Empire. Vice Admiral Hailey wants an experienced manta crew at Starbase 600 to aid in training his new crews. Starfleet picked us.\*\*

"I am going to miss you."

\*\*Why don't you get a group together and tour with Fuzzy?\*\*

"Well, it wouldn't be my buddy Taraban, but that is an idea I do need to look into."

\*\*I'll put in a good word for you. We are also putting together another group to work out of Oz, and one to work the frontier as well.\*\*

"Oz? Where is Oz?"

\*\*Where I am going.\*\*

"Well shut my mouth. I'll just see if I can dig up a couple of friends that want to shake the dust of this old world from their heels and see the stars."

\*\*I've got a week. I'll take you with me.\*\*

"Taraban ol' buddy, you have a deal."

Travelin' Blues -- Garry Stahl, February 2005.

*Everyone needs a hobby and Taraban hasn't been sitting idle waiting for the next story. It seems he has been traveling Earth looking for the real music.*

# Logic

"My most logical course action at this time is to shoot you."

Jai the Ferengi's eyes bugged out, "Nonononnono! No you, you don't want to do that!" Jai squealed looking down the emitter of the phaser that was suddenly in the Vulcan's hand. "I can fix it, I can, I will!"

T'sark's phaser did not waver a degree. "Your reputation for failure is only exceeded by your reputation for being untrustworthy when out of sight. I have no logical means of trusting you, and no reasonable means of retrieving my losses, caused by your double-dealing." Her grip tightened on the phaser.

Jai was on the deck sobbing. "Please, I'll pay you! I'll pay you now, out of my own pocket!" Traffic at the High Crystal dock flowed around the confrontation.

T'sark nodded to her companion who opened the datalink on his PADD. She gestured with the phaser. "Your opportunity for honesty is slipping away."

Jai scrabbled for his PADD and made the transfer with shaking fingers. The tall male nodded to his companion as the transfer was complete.

The phaser disappeared back into T'sark's sleeve. "It has been agreeable doing business with you."

Jai sat on the deck as the Vulcans departed. "Yea, agreeable."

T'sark folded her hands into her sleeves as she departed with her companion. As they walked he spoke. "I do not claim to understand your logic T'sark, however I cannot fault its effectiveness. From what philosophy does it stem?"

"The words of a famous Human."

"A Human? Indeed."

"I find Human philosophy useful when dealing with Frerngi, Stenn."

Stenn nodded. "Yes, I can see a certain logic in that. What are these words?"

" You get a lot more with a kind word and a gun than you do with a kind word alone."

"Fascinating."

Logic -- Garry Stahl, October 2006

*This is the result of one of Jame Jones' photo manips and a conversation I had with Jay the other night. Jai Ferengi plays his usual role in these things, and is © Jay P. Hailey.*

# Freedom

"I don't follow the news much. I never considered that a failing until now. Not being aware of current events has a good chance of being the death of me.

"I suppose I should explain. I am a beast, a killer, an Angosian super soldier. I was a weapon in a long ended war, a weapon that those that made me could neither destroy, nor easily cast aside. They tried to bottle us up, deny that we existed. I got away, one of the many that did. But, what is a monster to do?

"I found a profession in doing what monsters do best. But not like you might think. Yes, I do take contracts, and I kill people. It hasn't gotten me a single slip of latinum. I never kill the target, I kill the targeter. Those that wish others to die, and are unwilling to do the job themselves are monsters too. The best employ for an out of work monster is putting down monsters.

"Back to current events. My last monster was a head of state it seems. One would think such people would have their own monsters on call, and not need independent ones. Deniable force I suppose. In any case governments do have resources. I had a hunter on my tail, a good one. I have been trying to shake him for over a week, and I still had a hunter on my tail. I still have one trick left, time to use it."

Magwar dropped down behind the hunter and he spun to face him at the same time. Neither shot, weapons ready.

Magwar's eyes went wide. "Argon?"

"Magwar. I was starting to suspect something, you are hard to catch." He did not drop the aim of his weapon.

"Why are you doing the bidding of the Cardassians?"

"They asked me to, nicely. Killing the Senior Councilman wasn't exactly something they could let rest."

"He needed to die Argon. He hired me to kill someone else."

"I heard your morals had twisted some funny way."

"He was a monster, just like the rest."

"I never considered it my right to decide even if living in peace seems impossible to do."

"So, why haven't you shot me?"

"I can ask the same question Magwar."

Magwar looked down the barrel of the phaser. "At least some good will come of this Argon."

"How so old friend?"

"No mater what happens, one of us will be free."

*A dark night and dark thoughts. Right after I told Jay Hailey my head was empty.*

*For those that do not recall the background this is from the List of Star Trek Races, in Wilkapedia. The episode was from TNG "The Hunted". What does an out of work monster do? "Usually considered non-violent, 'Angosian authorities were responsible for genetically and chemically engineering soldiersto fight in their Tarsian Wars. But the process was irreversible, and the 'super soldiers' were considered outcasts and criminals that could not function or co-exist alongside the normal population of Angosian society, and as such were forced to be permanently confined to a penal settlement on an Angosian moon."*

## Archeology

Another arrowhead. The Lieutenant picked it up out of the dirt. She rubbed it off on her sleeve and turned it over in her hands. The ruins were lousy with the things. She looked at said ruins as they faded off up into the hills. Down here at the base of the hill is where all the arrowheads where, right next to the crumbling tower of artificial stone.

The Chief came up beside her. "Lieutenant, the base camp is finished. What do we start on next?"

She turned to the Chief. "Start the survey crews. Lets get the basic geophysics done before nightfall." She flipped the arrowhead to the Chief. "Chief, what do you think they were for?"

He turned the object over in his hands. "Well, I would say a primitive weapon, but they are not primitive and clearly not balanced as weapons."

"Hopefully we will find some solid records in the ruins. What is left of the computers in orbit is worthless. This city does appear to be the ground control center for the space bore activity."

"Yes, the motifs in the largest remaining stations and the motifs here do match. As well as matching ruins all over this sector of the Galaxy. If any spot is it, this is it."

The Chief tossed the arrowhead back into the dirt. "So, we're finally going to get some answers as to what 'Starfleet' was."

Archeology -- Garry Stahl, July 2005

*I suppose this is a postscript to Star Trek at large. "And this too shall pass."*